

VZCZCXRO2858

PP RUEHBC RUEHKUK RUEHMOS
DE RUEHIHL #0011 0261302

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FM REO HILLAH

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0528
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0513
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHIHL/REO HILLAH 0575

C O N F I D E N T I A L HILLAH 000011

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/26/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM I2

SUBJECT: NAJAF ELECTION RESULTS REACTION

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REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (U) This is a SET NAJAF cable.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY. Just a day after the release of the results of the December 15 national election by the IECI, reaction in the Najaf province was diverse and pointed. Many in the province, including local government officials and members of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), praised the results as a clear victory for the nation's Shi'a population. At the same time, those outside of the UIA were left with questions about the future government's legitimacy and ability to provide services for Iraqis. Taking up the middle ground, a member of Ayatollah Al Sistani's inner circle called for stability and progress in the name of serving the Iraqi people. END SUMMARY.

SCIRI SATISFIED

¶3. (C) Deputy Governor and SCIRI party member Abdul Hassan Abtan declared the results "acceptable" and said that he thought they showed UIC's success in bringing together political rivals. Sheik Hashim Abu Ragheif, a cleric for the office of Muqtada Al Sadr, generally agreed with Abtan's assessment. He asserted, however that he believes there were attempts to "limit the representation of the UIA in the new government". He noted that, for their part, Sadrists will, through their UIA affiliation work with all political entities to forge stability. The only exception to this spirit of cooperation is the Iraqi National Accord and former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, himself. He referred to Allawi as the "red limit". There is, he said, no room for conciliation. He further declared that the goal of the UIA would be, in his estimation, to "expedite the withdrawal of invasion forces in Iraq".

SISTANTI AFFILIATED CLERIC APPEALS FOR FAIRNESS

¶4. (C) Ali Al Gharawi, a cleric from the office of the Ayatollah Al Sistani noted that the Hawza supports a peaceful political process, no matter the result. It is important, he said, for those in power to support and recognize all ethnicities. It's vital he said, to ensure that the rights of minorities are not ignored. "If these results" he said, "are able to stop violence and bloodshed in the Iraqi community, it won't just be a victory, but a real success for Iraq".

COMPLAINTS FROM ALLAWI SLATE

¶5. (C) Abdul Al Essawi, of the Iraqi National Accord (INA), took an opposing view of the results. There were a great many frauds

perpetrated on Election Day, according to Al Essawi. Even, international organizations, he said, recognized the many irregularities. Nothing was done about these "crimes against Iraqis" because there was a conspiracy to satisfy the UIA and the Kurdish region. He said that the only recourse for his party may be to take up the role of opposition party in the new parliament. "We will, he asserted, "continue to be part of the political process.

¶6. (C) Among the citizenry of Najaf, one theme ran through all reactions; these results are good, if they mean better security. Cleary, security remains the chief concern of the populace. Nahaj Al Selawi, a grocer from the city of Najaf, said, "The new government must be assembled in a short time in order to avoid any disturbance in the security situation". "This is", he said, "vital in safe provinces such as Najaf". Sadiq Al Jabiri, a machinist, rang a universal note when he said that his only demands from the new government are: security, prosperity and cheap fuel.

¶7. (C) COMMENT. There are no real surprises in election reactions in Najaf. It remains to be seen if the "revolutionary" tone of the Sadrist will cause friction within the UIA. Sadrist are new to the political process and appear to chafe its restrictions. The Hawza conversely seems, already, to be weary of all things political and continues to retreat into the familiar world of the Marjaia. In the past year many of Najaf's citizens have questioned the ability of the government to deliver necessary goods and services. Their representation (mostly UIA) is made up of former members of the Candle List. If they are unable to better their record in meeting their constituents' demands, it is possible that they will pay a price at the polls in the coming provincial elections. END COMMENT.

FONTENEAU